Introduction

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair”

A Tale of Two Cities.

There was a time when language was respected as a tangible set of signs capable of representing corporeal reality and its transcendental meanings. In this order, language, meaning and being co-existed peacefully (The Order of Things 17–44). The correspondence between the represented reality and its linguistic representation was smooth and untroubled as the mimetic competence of language was never at doubt. A tacit understanding that truth and authority were implicit to language, that the representation it made of reality accomplished verisimilitude through mimetic excellence and that at no instance should the veracity of linguistic representation be doubted precluded the examination of its claims. It was taken for granted, once, that God had created human language along with the universe and that through the act of naming the things that make up the world one could point to the absolute origin of divine creation itself.
The world order was conceived as uncomplicated and harmonious: all elements comfortable in their designated places and language, the unquestioned universal instrument, facilitating the process of meaning and understanding. All this began to change with the advent of the secular modern age, as Foucault points out in *The Order of Things*. But the transformations became radical and in many ways epoch-making by the later half of the twentieth century. The traditional discourse of representation began to crumble before the postmodernist interrogation of the assumed legitimacy and the self-proclaimed authority of the discourse and the upshot was that language gained a new materiality.

Thomas Docherty in “The Ethics of Alterity” suggests that “As in most art-forms and cultural practices, the postmodern impetus is almost synonymous with the questioning of representation” (183). Dissonance, dispersion and finitude characterise the emergent materiality acquired by language after the crisis of representation. Language shifted from being a universal, monolithic discourse wherein particular representations unequivocally reflected reality, to just another activity imploding into an irreversible multiplicity. Foucault says, “When the unity of general grammar – discourse – was broken up, language appeared in a multiplicity, whose unity was probably irrevocable” (*The Order of Things* 304). Instead of mirroring a prior order and instead of coinciding with itself so as to become a translucent medium, language now emerges as a multi-valent ‘other’
within the space it once occupied. This newly emergent polysemous quality implies levels of material layers that make language opaque, which in turn obliterate the transparency essential for the free transference of meaning into the word.

Words now seem to beget other words whose origins are not attested by universal meaning and are in turn overrun by other words, creating a trail leading further into the multiple dimensions of linguistic origins. Through this problematic presence, language becomes an auto-telic entity, capable of revealing only itself. A linguistic play now resides in place of the material reality and metaphysical transcendence that it purported to represent. From a postmodern perspective, language is an ambiguous and amorphous entity. Its legitimacy can never be fully established, nor its claims to universality validated. It is contingent and is governed by the multiple voices, and silences produced and exhausted within itself. Postmodern linguistic practices function mainly in self-referential ambit without recourse to any transcendental reality. According to Niall Lucy,

There is nothing ‘below’ the surface of any text. There is no prior (authorial) or underlying (structural) source or mechanism controlling the flows of meanings between texts and recipients (or novels and readers): there is only a ‘play’ of textual surfaces. Instead of meanings-to-say,
there is only meanings-as-play. (Postmodern Literary Theory 17)

With the concept of a universal and tangible reality that could invest meaningfulness to linguistic activity in classical representation becoming highly suspect and with the unified subjectivity that had given it substance in modernity dissolved, language, in the postmodern context, has become fragmentary. The space of representation too undergoes a similar dislocation altering its meaning and its form. As language becomes further and further estranged from itself, the world represented by it and the nature of the reality reflected by it tend to suffer a similar fate.

The transformation of language described by Foucault in The Order of Things has two main consequences. Language lost its power as an external agency that could articulate things into words. Language is located at the source of the internal act that establishes a primary relationship between words and things. As the empirical order of things, which had regulated representation, breaks away from its linguistic components the order is reconstituted within the language emancipated from the hold of representation. In the classical age, language was one single discourse:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was the immediate and spontaneous unfolding of representation; it was in that order in the first place that representation
received their primary signs, patterned and regrouped their common features, and established their relations of identity or attribution; language was a form of knowing and knowing was automatically discourse. (The Order of Things 295)

However, with the modern age:

Language began to fold in upon itself, to acquire its own particular density, to deploy a history, objectivity, and laws of its own. It became one object of knowledge among others, on the same levels as living beings, wealth and value, and the history of events and men. (The Order of Things 296)

George Steiner in Language and Silence (1-45) strikes a similar attitude when he charters out the emergence of a non-verbal, mathematical mode of communication in place of a unified discourse of the classical age. In the twentieth century, asserts Steiner, it comprises an even narrower domain with large areas of meaning belonging to such non-verbal language as mathematics, symbolic logic, and formulas of chemical and electronic relations. With epistemology getting increasingly compartmentalised, language has lost its original function as the sole custodian of truth. For Steiner the result is a predilection for an epistemological and linguistic silence, which annihilates the classical tenets of meaning and representation.
Paul de Man has pointed out that the classical theory of language operated on a convenient but somewhat strained separation between grammar, rhetoric and logic (Blindness and Insight 145-167). Grammar as the organising structure internal to language encroaches into the extra-linguistic world of reference because it is thought to be part of a system of logic that assumes the obviousness of such a movement. The function of the verb ‘to be’ exemplifies this. According to Foucault, (it) held sway on the frontiers of language, both because it was the primary link between words and because it possessed the fundamental power of affirmation; it marked the threshold of language, indicated its specificity and connected it, in an ineffaceable way, to the forms of thought. (The Order of Things 295)

The verb ‘to be’ fulfils a double function. First, it shapes language after the grand narratives of thought, which, in the logic of representation, regulate knowledge along with reality. Secondly, it makes the given reality analogous with linguistic systems so that the logic of nature and that of thought appear to spring from the same transcendental reality. The verb ‘to be’ is regarded as the direct and spontaneous issue of a God-given order. It is not the product of language and, thus, could be attributed to the world. ‘To be’ as a linguistic unit of pure difference whose materiality could threaten the
concept ‘to be’ is erased or repressed and is forced to function as the representative of a logic that forces itself directly on to the given. Derrida sums up the idea of the logos that preceded language:

Thus, within this epoch, [the classical age] reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, were confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos. Even when the thing, the “referent,” is not immediately related to the logos of the creator God. (Of Grammatology 14)

Foucault shows that modern theories of language reveal the linguistic origin of systems of thought controlling the ontological status of the world. In the process, he also points out another logic that undermines the integrity of the grammar-based system from within. According to him the main consequence of this transition was that

The ontological transition provided by the verb ‘to be’ between speaking and thinking is removed; whereupon language acquires a being proper to itself. In addition, this being contains the laws that govern it. (The Order of Things 295)
This profound shift divorces language from the realm of absolute knowledge and absolute representation by refusing it, what Foucault would call, “the representativity of the representation in so far as it is representable” (The Order of Things 65). Instead of confirming to the representativity of representation, language is drawn by a new fascination: that of its own mode of functioning based on an interior mechanism, which no longer follows the order of representation but, on the contrary, disrupts the way in which representation was previously able to reflect reality.

The early eighteenth-century linguists found out that an internal economy (something like a pure grammar) controlled the articulations of words based on a logic that was not in keeping with the functions of representation. The presence of this internal economy regulated the way language represented the outside world: in the classical representation, naming the world and knowing it were inseparably linked. There was no rift between the sign and what it represented (The Order of Things 46-76). There is an assumed link at the point of the origin between the representative and the represented characterised by the unifying moment of ‘to be’. The interior and the exterior combined to allow one single universal reality to result. This is the point where language transcended itself to become one with the world of reality and entwine its voice in the sinews of nature.
In postmodernity, the rhetorical impulse severs language from all reference to any absolute origin prior to its being. ‘To be’ arises with the word ‘to be’ instead of constituting a self-contained presence actualised by language. It becomes the site of an original disjunction where the world emerges simultaneously with and without the word rather than into the word thereby refusing to promote the system of representation. Instead of harmonising an object with its own internal order and in place of conjoining the represented with the representation, language now reinforces the original gap and the incommensurability of the world and its representation.

Jean François Lyotard has looked at postmodernity in terms of the “crisis of narratives” (Postmodern Condition xxiii). Postmodernity is the departure from grand narratives of classicism and modernity. Lyotard shows how grand narratives give directives to the organisation of narratives and forces it to return to the centre, origin or meaning. The grand narrative is the organisation of historical moments in terms of the projected meaning. Classical positivism places the speaker (the writer) as a mere contingency upon the truth of the narrated. Knowledge is regarded as purely referential. Classicism, thus, privileges the referent over the sender or receiver. In Just Gaming Lyotard analyses and displaces the claims of classicism to objective description. Modernity privileges the sender (the subject) over the referent or the receiver. The legitimation of knowledge is done in
reference to a subjective and rational capacity to know or a will to power. Modernity’s metanarratives is a project, which claims to ‘better’ the past through the emancipation of the universal subject. Thus, science will free humanity from superstition through enlightenment leading to universal knowledge and the dialectic of Hegelian epistemology will lead man to a trans-historical truth. The characteristic of both classicism and modernism is to erect one instance of narrative to the point where it governs narration from outside and becomes a meta-narrative. If classicism privileges the referent, if modernism privileges the subject, then the postmodern condition is one in which no single instance of narrative can exert a claim to dominate language and narrative by standing beyond it. The affectations of the modernist subject to the sovereign origin of the narrative are displaced. Postmodernism does not privilege the referent, the narrating subject, or the addressee. The referent is the object of a narrative and the subject is always already placed within narration. There is no meta-narrative to make narrative its object, there are only ‘little narratives.’ Art in postmodernity is the site of resistance to metalanguage. Narration cannot enforce a subjective viewpoint since the subject that narrates is itself constituted by the process of narration. Narratives thus both constitute and disrupt representation. It is not simply the vehicle of meaning, but constructs the meaning it carries. Language comes to embody the chasm between being and
naming that end up in the rupture of the site of origin. Postmodern fiction, for instance, re-enacts this rupture through its nagging insistence on self-reflexivity.

A new economy, which corresponds to what Foucault calls the materiality of language (The Order of Things 294-300) upsets the being of thought and its objects. Postmodernity offers the possibility of a new kind of ontology, severed from metaphysics and bound to language and to the way language solves the question of its own being. In postmodernity, the form and meaning of the world depends more than ever on how it is spoken by the language increasingly concerned with how it speaks itself. The knowledge about the world depends on the limit to which language can fix itself in the world it speaks, and on the extent to which the world can be grounded in the world in which it is spoken. However, in postmodernity language itself is ungrounded, unpredictable and self-ignorant. The representation of ontology now depends not on any transcendental discourse but on an unpredictable internal displacement that is material and linguistic in nature.

By the time, language has entered what Foucault calls the order of times (232-236) the representation of the world and all the knowledge about the world is now submitted to a force described by Foucault as the beginning of ‘history’:

As long as language was defined as discourse, it could have no other history than that of its representations: if
ideas, things, knowledge, or feelings happened to change, then and only then, did a given language undergo modification, and in the same proportion as the changes in question. But from now on there is an ‘interior mechanism’ in languages which determines not only each one’s individuality but also its resemblances to the others: it is this mechanism, the bearer of identity and difference, the sign of adjacency, the mark of kinship, that is now to become the basis for history. By its means, historicity will be able to introduce itself into the density of the spoken word itself. (236)

Dialectics had taken on the task of tempering and taming this historicity. Derrida, in “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology” (Margins of Philosophy 69-108), has shown how, in modernity, the force of pure difference present in language is tamed by Hegelian Semiology. It will try to combine the moment of origin with that of the end as it endeavours to embody a teleological movement able to carry purpose, substance, stability and presence within the temporal development of absolute spirit. Linda Hutcheon declares emphatically that “there is no dialectic in the postmodern: the self-reflexive remains distinct from its traditionally accepted contrary—the historico-political context in which it is embedded”(x).
This is a view shared by Emmanuel Levinas in *Reality and Its Shadow* as he analyses the handling of time and reality in fiction.

They can be narrated because their being resembles itself, doubles itself and immobilizes. Such fixity is wholly different from that of concepts, which imitates life, offers reality to our powers, to truth, opens dialectic. By its reflection in a narrative, being has a non-dialectical fixity, stops dialectics and time. (122)

He points out that being escapes from the vice-grip of the dialectic when it is reflected in fictional narrative. Postmodernist theoreticians have always highlighted the problem of authoritative censuring by the discourse of representation conditioned by dialectical epistemology. Andrew Gibson rightly suggests: “Representational texts are haunted by the question of epistemological closure, of the epistemological limits of their project, of the grounds for their representational authority” (66).

Awareness of the perils of this dictatorial epistemology has necessitated the evolution of a series of disjunctive positions intended to disrupt the edifice of representation from within. First, the empirical level of representation, occupied by the natural order of things, is rejected. Next, a clear separation occurs between words and things. A further displacement of the initial rupture between words and things occurs as language loses its ability to represent this reality. This
is very important because the emphasis in postmodernity is on finitude and ignorance and they are taken as the very substance of the being of thought. In this economy of ignorance, language has been divorced from any pretense or obligation to comprehend the world in full. Instead, it has come to interrogate exclusively and unsuccessfully its own conditions of possibility.

There is a complex paradoxical movement in postmodernity through which the order of representation tends to interiorise and exteriorise itself simultaneously. While the representation seems more than ever dependent upon the ability of language to articulate itself properly into discourse lest it should recede into confusion and oblivion, there emerges within the logic of that articulation a level of materiality that is not assimilated into that logic, or made intelligible by it. This incomprehensibility within the representation by language will generate postmodern fiction’s preoccupation with self-reflexivity.

The existence of this elusive materiality attempts to defeat the very purpose of self-reflexivity and constitute an inner lack at work within language. In turn, the awareness of this lack engenders an excessive production of words incapable of grasping the very meaning that propels them. Samuel Beckett, the Irish-turned-French dramatist and novelist, has, in “Three Dialogues”, put succinctly the predicament of the postmodern artist thus:
The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (16)

The closure that the traditional process of representation is able to effect is breached. A rupture occurs within the language of representation as words cease to reflect external entities by corresponding directly to them. A similar crisis occurs within thought itself, as the very process of conceptual representation that constituted its ground deserts it. Thought is now carried over to a level of internal otherness that changes its mode from one regulated by the affirmative outside to the one dominated by the self-interrogative inside. This fate is reserved for all postmodernist writers since, in the words of Patricia Waugh, the postmodern is a radical subjective fictionality, an aesthetics which refuses mimesis, organic unity, consensus, [and] it offers multiple perspectives which ostentatiously and dramatically refuse to coalesce or resolve into some transcendent or more profound whole. (27)

In postmodernity language is denied the comfort of a pure origin, whether it is external in the world it represents or internal in the words that try to represent this world. Consequently, language finds itself in a non-place. The locus of language is neither
immediately identifiable as outside nor directly apprehensible as inside. Beckett’s language, for instance, folds the outside into the inside and experiences the latter not as a form to reside in but as a force that further alienates language from itself. The subject-object relation and the possibility of their infinite communication based on their previous respective identification gives way to a kind of monologue where language communicates with language in a process that alters the object of communication beyond recognition.

Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, regards this non-place as the starting-point of the narrative, the moment of the loss of origin from where the process of memory, of language reflecting on language, language creating its own doubles, enters into an unending and dizzying process of self-multiplication, and then strives to trace out the lines of its own genesis (303-342). Likewise, postmodern fiction, trying to come to terms with the origin of its language, can only present itself as one more articulation of the silence, as one more adventure into the inevitable void.

In postmodernity, the writer cannot hope to conjure up the world as it once stood. History, for Foucault, can never be a reconstruction. It is an encounter that repeats itself between thought and its other. This other never precedes thought as an origin external to thought that can be named and known or a future that can be predicted and represented in advance. It always arises within thought, within the self-
consciousness of thought, pointing to a level of divergences that can be reduced to identification. In this encounter a discrepancy, symbolized by the theme of the double in Foucault and Beckett, exists preventing repetition from becoming a mere reproduction of the same. When postmodernist thought gazes into itself, it never sees itself, but an insistent double that is not just itself or another, but a difference between the two, the separating line that crosses into both dimensions transgressing the line that separates them. In Beckett, this line amounts to language transgressing its own limits and losing its identity, to memory reaching back into itself only to multiply and erase itself at the same time. Here Foucault and Beckett come together as historian and novelist through the identical ways by which they experience and engage language. Their particular treatment of language leads them to challenge the principles governing the very disciplines to which they belong and to produce a corpus of thought that always questions and transgresses the thin line between history and fiction. The fact that the very existence of the language they use depends on confusion between reality and fiction, between what is and what is told, dissolves the boundary between the two.

Watt the character, who has not performed an interpretation in ages, likes to toy and experiment with language, to disturb its syntax and its morphology, to treat it as an alien yet proximate being whose logic can be interrogated, transgressed and parodied. Here Beckett
engages himself with the internal movement that propels the language of postmodernity and thwarts the natural articulation performed by representation. The force of a rebellious temporality that complicates the structure of time itself motivates Watt’s bricolage of language. For him language is a strange object that calls attention to the rawness of its own being. The more language attracts attention to itself the more it seems to be able to affect precisely that which, according to the logic of representation, is not language. Writing on Beckett John Pilling notes:

Every word uttered (and by extension every word written and sent to publishers) is somehow an impertinence, a needless addition to a state in which, if admittedly nothing is said, at least nothing can be misunderstood. [ . . . ] In recent years, however, in exploring the landscape of the mind, he has unveiled a land in which signs can hardly be interpreted, where the act of interpretation is bedevilled by the compulsion to express, and where expression is reduced to a denuded, occasionally hermetic language. (26)

Beckett here registers again the force of an event that problematizes the passage of the sign into the thing and vice-versa. This event corresponds with the emergence of an alienated language at the heart of the very act of speaking. The shift that initially seemed to affect the external world, the outside referent redefined and displaced
from within the movement of language, promptly comes to invade the very interiority of speech. A curious paradox is at work: the more the individual thinks of himself as other than language the more he produces more language to state that he is other than language. This is because our being does not designate a single essence. Human being is a kind of historically produced moment, the site of an empirico-trancendental redoubling, a subject and an object entwined. He is that which comes to occupy precariously the fissure thrown open by the rupturing of representation. He is both the result of a language emancipated from representation as well as the place left deserted by that emancipation. Man is both the producer of the excess of language as well as that which experiences the very lack that language fails to compensate for.

In Beckett, we come across a corpus where the being of the person and the being of his language blend in a voice, which is also in a way the act of writing. Foucault would label this particular junction as the site of postmodern literature. Here the fragmented ideal of representation transforms itself into the adventure of a thought awakening to the paradoxical logic of a language severed from ordinary speech and which is brought to its own uncertain temporality and space.

This crucial encounter between voice (what speaks in language) and language (what speaks the voice) leads to the
emergence of writing, the only purpose of which is to interrogate
that encounter to solve the question of its origin. But this
movement of self-reflexivity fails to promise a purposeful and
logical progression. Instead, as in The Unnamable, it ends up in
the production of more otherness within the voice, of more
alienation and more wandering.

This condition epitomises postmodern literature because
here language does not address itself to a prior reality as in the
mimetic theory or to some primal exterior source as in Romantic
thought. It is a voice born of the very language that is also
registered within the same voice. In turn, the identity of
language as well as its origin depends upon the destiny of the
thought attempting to write itself through this language. Foucault
sums up:

This is because at the beginning of the nineteenth
century, at a time when language was burying itself
within its own density as an object and allowing
itself to be traversed, through and through, by
knowledge, it was also reconstituting itself
elsewhere, in an independent form, difficult of
access, folded back upon the enigma of its own
origin and existing wholly in reference to the pure
act of writing. (The Order of Things 300)
Return to the origin of the word is not addressed to a transcendental subject capable of apprehending and understanding this origin. On the contrary, it is repeated in the differential and material return of language to itself where it becomes lost in the voice writing itself.

Borrowing the term from Blanchot, Foucault, in “The Thought of the Outside” elaborates on this site of internal–external resonance within postmodern literature. It is characterised by the return in language of an act of pure writing that is not submitted to any prior speech (148 – 169). In “Writing before the Letter” Derrida has shown how the subservience of writing to speech in the system of representation is tied to the repression of what he calls the writing within the voice identified as difference (27–73). In this phonocentric model based on absolute knowledge writing merely mirrors an unproblematic world already out there and is founded on the discursive conceptual space of representation. Writing is just a signifier representing perfectly a sign that has already been constituted.

With postmodern literature, born of the internal rupturing of the sign, writing becomes a space of fundamental ignorance where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is questioned and challenged. It wants to displace the binary of the
signifier-signified combine that had constituted the indubitable sign in classical representation. The sign was supposed to represent an established meaning and the activity of language was reduced to that of a catalytic representative uninvolved in the production of meaning.

Postmodern literature in its self-reflexivity interrogates its own locus together with the interior space of the sign thus displacing the site of the production of meaning. It discovers that the production and repetition is always dependent upon a linguistic activity. This empowers language but, as Foucault has warned, postmodern literature should not be approached as a formalistic activity involving the play of pure signifiers. Instead, it should be viewed as an activity that fully involves its language in the production of meaning.

The reason why the practice of postmodern narrative is termed as game or play of the signifier is that it has be to guarded against the dangers of authoritarian positions. The unqualified empowerment of literature could result in the reification itself as an absolute grand narrative contravening its own avowed non-metanarrative stance. As language discloses the role it plays in the production of meaning, it experiences the arbitrariness and the contingent nature of meaning. Language discovers that it is in control of a production that exceeds the
very space it occupies in the act of representation. The level in which this transgression happens is the locus of the thought of the outside. Here thought is defined by the production of a voice unable to disentangle itself from a language that repeats this voice differentially. Postmodern narrative as the thought of the outside is an experience where the otherness already present in language attaches itself completely to the repetition of the voice that speaks in the interiority of the text, to the echo of a thought attempting to think itself. The unnamable confesses:

I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on the road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular. (357)

This economy of reflexivity does not lead to the recovery of any absolute or unique voice within postmodern literature. Rather, it functions as a self–differentiating repetition that further alienates thought from itself because it constitutes a passage towards the outside where the voice disappears in itself. The subject can never be returned to an essence speaking from a point of absolute anteriority located in the interiority of the
consciousness. It can never return the sign to the protective interiority of the signified with language acting as mere external signifier. It is a questioning of limits, a problematization of the limits set to experience and meaning by the language of representation. The absence of both the transcendental subject and of an absolute and essential external world is linked to a transgressive operation in writing.

II

_Ever tried. Ever failed. Never mind. Try again. Fail better._

_The Unnamable_

This thesis attempts a close reading of four novels by Samuel Beckett—_Watt, Molloy, Malone Dies_ and _The Unnamable_— to highlight the postmodernist transgression of the classical and modernist concepts of representation through difference and repetition. The scope of the examination was limited to the four novels because they adequately exemplify the preoccupations of Beckettian oeuvre.

In place of the modernist arrogance of the seemingly positive subject, his novels profess self-annihilation, doubt and ignorance. Describing a condition familiar to contemporary writers Deleuze writes:
How else can one write but of those things which one doesn’t know, or knows badly? It is precisely there that we imagine having something to say. We write only at the frontiers of our knowledge, at the border which separates our knowledge from our ignorance and transforms the one into the other. (Difference and Repetition xxii)

Samuel Beckett’s writing enacts a similar transaction between knowledge and ignorance, an ambiguous passage in and out of meaning and non-sense. To a large extent this process is incomprehensible and unpresentable. It underlines a failure. Beckett’s fiction coincides with the transgressive mode of this passage, the movement of the limit that simultaneously outlines and unframes reality, crossing and re-crossing into terrains that are instantly altered into otherness and pass beyond recognition. The Beckettian text exposes the classical concept of representation as a fictive ideal that can always be transgressed because, even though it purports to be universal, it is not adequate to the task of representing the complex reality it tries to engage. Beckett recovers the impossibility lodged at the heart of all the possibilities opened up by the discourse of representation. He transgresses modernism by undermining the tall claims of modernist subject positions a propos the representation of reality, fragmented or otherwise
In Beckett, transgression functions as a textual rupture generating revisions and transmutations within the representation of thought in language. When transgression becomes the code of textual production that rebels against the axioms of representation, the objectivity of reality is jeopardized and the subject becomes nomadic. Transgression performs an internal re-writing of representation, a paradoxical act that is indistinguishable from resistance and incursion, disturbance and reconstitution.

Our implicit trust of metaphysics and representation makes us feel that we can comprehend in its entirety, and that we can tell the difference between knowledge and ignorance, inside and outside, subject and object, meaning and non-sense in precise terms. We express this difference using language that we do not question, accepting all its rules as self-evident, and trusting the words to know what they are doing. It is through the unfettered application of language and the employment of the methods of representation in our arsenal that we gain power to impose our will and hegemony over nature.

Beckett wanted to upset the rules of the game. His decision to write in French, a non-native language for him, was like Watt’s forced transgressions at Knott’s house. It was both an obligation and a compulsion. In this sense, Beckett’s invasion of the French language is a radical event symptomatic of postmodern literature. He deliberately
chooses the decentred space of an alien language that he cannot, as an
author, claim to be the best possible medium close to his heart. His
attempts to observe meaning and knowledge as neutrally as possible
arose out of a postmodern sense of ignorance and a compulsion to
occupy transgressively this meaning and knowledge in order to contest
its hegemony and unity from within. The postmodern impulse, right
from the early days, was to contest modernist values. In an interview
with Israel Shenker, Beckett remarked that whereas Joyce was a superb
manipulator of materials, he was “working with impotence, ignorance”
(New York Times 3). Discussing of the poems of Denis Devlin, Beckett
categorically rejected the optimism of modernist masters remarking,
“art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and
does not make clear” (Disjecta 94). Similarly in Dialogues With
Georges Duthuit Beckett describes “an art [...] weary of pretending to
be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing”(103).
This awkward cynicism could be related to the postmodern
temperament exhibited by him. In “Fiction Today or The Pursuit of
Non-Knowledge” Raymond Federman suggests that postmodern
novelists were “more concerned with the problems of writing their
books, of letting the difficulty of writing fiction transpire in fiction
itself [...] than [...] with the problems of man”(10).

Born of the doubt and the scepticism that has haunted modern
western thought since Montaigne, Beckett’s fictional world constitutes
a challenge to metaphysics and its devotion to the pursuit of the grand narratives of absolute knowledge and Truth. Beckett stages a critical engagement with the perennial question of being and of its relationship with thought and language, which results in an interrogation of the general project of metaphysics. Beckett offers no answers as he generates a torrent of questions in the novels embedding perennial philosophic quests into narratives of fictions. Beckett exemplifies a literature that, according to David Carroll, “creates openings through which critical philosophy can also move in order to battle with philosophical authority and the various forms of closure it imposes” (89-90). Striking a similar attitude, St John Butler Lance suggests, “Beckett’s revolt is clearly not something political or psychological. It is something ontological” (151).

Beckett’s engagement with being takes the form of a transgressive activity disrupting certain tendencies in the history of western metaphysical thought which had carried out the representation of being through the repression of difference. The radical concepts of difference and repetition presented by Deleuze suggest levels of difference that operate outside being even as they remain interior to the conceptual space, thus producing an internal displacement of the concept. Similarly, Beckett’s transgression results in the internal disarray of the order of representation. His works prompt the
reshuffling of the conceptual apparatus that constitute the discourse of representation.

Many critics have linked the lack of form in his work and the general theme of failure with the downside of representation caused by the disjunction between words and things. For example, Lawrence Miller is of the opinion that

For Beckett, as for his characters, public expressions and private experience never coincide; utterances and inscriptions diverge; words and things fall away from one another. The accumulation of expressive dilemmas exhibits the failure of modernist aspirations to relate art and life, to achieve in artistic expression a redemptive transformation of life. (xi)

Beckett’s attempts at representation wrestle with the question of form as they come up against the impossibility to represent. The encounter with intractable failure stimulates a type of writing that causes a simultaneous internal displacement of the space of representation. This, however, does not amount to a simple dialectical resolution but results in an unremitting questioning and reshuffling of the system organizing that space. Beckett refuses to take the course of dialectics and instead chooses to be transgressive through repetition and difference. He embarks on a postmodern interrogation of dialectics and refuses to clear the ambiguity that complicates the
relationship between the constituents of any given binary. Through a technique of permutations, he attempts to recover the dynamics of an animated divergence. This involves a paradoxical logic of simulacrum and parody, which refuses to reconcile with the normal kind of representation built on well-defined dualities. Beckett does identify self-contained entities. But he succeeds in problematizing the classical and modernist spaces of identity that organizes dyads according to predetermined modes of relation.

The chaotic form of the novels perturbed Beckett’s early critics, as their message of failure and the all-pervasive sense of ignorance. They viewed Beckett’s emphasis on these aspects as an artistic and existentialist enlargement of man’s experience in life. In Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett’s Early Fiction Raymond Federman, for example, suggests that:

> By their unorthodox form, their lack of elements essential to the nature of fiction, their deceptive use of language, their apparent incoherence, and above all their ambiguous suggestiveness, they [Beckett’s novels] lead to contradictory interpretation [. . .]. However, a patient reading of these works reveals new concepts of fiction, an original vision of man’s existential dilemma. (3)

J.E. Dearlove points out that Beckett’s narratives
are united less by stylistic, metaphoric, and thematic
designs than by their unremitting efforts to find a literary
shape of the proposition that perhaps no relationships exist
between or among the artist, his art and an external reality.

(3)

To some of these critics, Beckett is fundamentally an avant-garde modernist. He makes fresh discoveries and challenges accepted ideas and forms of representation but remains within the framework of the existentialist ideology that, as Thomas Trezise points out in *Into the Breach*, “grew out of phenomenology in the forties and fifties and has since pervaded the interpretation of Beckett’s work”(ix). No such comfort is afforded in Beckett’s works, which in fact constitute a thorough and relentless critique and transgression of classical and modernist humanism analogous to Foucault’s apocalyptic vision of the disappearance of man. Foucault concludes *The Order of Things* thus:

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows man is an
invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.
If those arrangements [which define man] were to
disappear as they appeared, if some event [...] were to
cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought
did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can
certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face
drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (387)
Though Professor Richard Begam would like to call Beckett the last of the modernists his analysis of Beckett’s major novels in *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* helps to bring out the postmodernist tendencies in them. Professor Begum notes that Foucault’s final image of the face drawn in sand recalls

a Beckettian universe, one long since abandoned by God and now inhabited not by man but by the effigy of his former self, a pale and spectral being that the tides of time gradually wash away. What Foucault describes--the now-familiar "end of man"--is part of the larger discourse associated with the "end of modernity." Standing behind this discourse and helping to motivate it is an anti-Enlightenment critique of humanism that rejects the idea that the cogito provides the ground of all knowledge, that "truth" is exclusively a function of human perception.

(149)

In this sense, Beckett’s thoughts fit in better with the postmodern ethos. This view is also substantiated by Lyotard’s observation that the postmodern is that which cannot grant itself the comfort of good form, that which is situated beyond a way of thinking that still ties modern art to a belief in redemption and a concomitant nostalgia for good forms (*The Postmodern Condition* 81). Lawrence Miller categorically
states that “Beckett’s [. . .] novels anticipate the irony and aporia of postmodern thought” (xi).

One of the thrust areas of this thesis is the deployment of parody in *Watt*. Parody in Beckett undermines the possibility of good form as it occurs within representation and causes the proliferation and the ultimate disintegration of the discourse of representation and its diffusion into local, little narratives that have lost the claims of universality bestowed on them by the presence of “metanarratives” (*The Postmodern Condition* xxiv). *Watt* reflects the disintegration of language as universal discourse and its implosion into the infinity of local and singular languages that appear to be independent of one another. Beckett’s fictions constitute a questioning of being that stems from the painful fact that the text cannot resolve the question of its own being. Placed in the limbo of silence where it is divorced from both an internally cohesive logic and an externally coherent world, Beckett’s language becomes an activity that searches for new moorings. It questions the ground of its being only to encounter further erosions produced by its own search for ground.

Both Foucault and Beckett share the awareness of the groundlessness of their discursive practises, which in turn spurs on their activity: the making of a ground knowing that there is no ground. This problematic results, in Foucault, in a temporal scheme where the consciousness of the lack of grounding translates into a movement
where anteriority is always haunted by its own becoming other in the future and where future is always experienced as anterior to its own emergence. The historical now is swallowed up by the very history it narrates; there is no vantage point away from history from which to tell history. If you are narrating history, you become history.

Similarly, in Beckett we see the dissolution of the model that governs traditional fiction whereby the time of the narrative voice appears to precede and dominate the birth of the narration. The Beckettian narrator knows only the endless experience of trying unsuccessfully to complete the narrative act. Eric P. Levy shows how Beckett has conceived a ‘pure narrator’ in his novels. He says

“The pure narrator, then, is the means Beckett has found to express the experience of Nothing, a flux of empty experience with neither subject nor object [....] Here, Beckett has hit upon a perfect way to indicate the absolute passivity of the experience of Nothing where empty impressions are registered but with no definite subject responsible for having them in the first place. (9-10)

Levy adds: “in the pure narrator and his experience of Nothing, Beckett expresses the impasse reached by the great enterprise of Western Humanism”(10). The voice proceeds in tandem with the words themselves and is caught in their anonymous flow. The present of the narrator is caught within words that regress infinitely into themselves,
leaving no opening for the narrator to emerge as a transcendental subject. The unnamed protagonist of *The Unnamable* laments:

> I’m in words, made of words, others’ words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I’m the air, the walls, the walled-in one, . . . I’m all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet.

(443)

The narrator and the narration have become the same. The source is reclaimed by its own narration, defined by its logic, unable to situate itself outside the disintegrating words that feed it. John Pilling remarks that language

> is designed to express, but almost actively refuses to do so. Our deepest insights remain incommunicado. Our most pressing concerns are dissipated by truisms and made to seem trivial and absurd. The whole of Beckett’s works stems from this realisation, and the realisation has two prongs; rage that things should be so, and resigned acceptance that things must be so. (26)
The very notions of speech and speaking subject are questioned. If the transcendental voice that had hitherto given meaning to language has now dissolved in the fragmentation of language what then speaks in language? What exactly is the voice of the narrator and what relation does it bear with a language and a narration emancipated from the hold of the author? Maurice Blanchot echoes these sentiments when he comments on *The Unnamable*:

> Who is doing the talking in Samuel Beckett’s novels? Who is this tireless “I” constantly repeating what seems to be always the same thing? What is he trying to say? What is the author looking for—who reads them? Or is he merely going round in circles, obscurely revolving, carried along by the momentum of a wandering voice, looking not so much sense as centre, producing an utterance without proper beginning or end, yet greedy, exacting a language that will never stop, that finds it intolerable to stop, for then would come the moment of terrible discovery, when talking stops, there is still talking, when language pauses, it perseveres; there is no silence, for within that voice silence eternally speaks. (*Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* 116 -117)

Molloy’s language, emanating from the depths of his consciousness while at the same time transporting him away from and out of himself,
translates into a murmur of multiple voices outside the purview of normal linguistic practice. The voices that Molloy hear have become detached from his own voice; they are like a buzzing pointing to nothing but their own noise rising and falling like the movement of waves against the background of a silent sea and sky. “I listen and the voices of a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky, enough to see by, yes, and frozen too” (41). They leave Molloy on one hand with no voice of his own and on the other with a surplus of voices that hold the key to his nomadic journey through human consciousness. The voices represent the anonymous force of an outside rupturing the internal consciousness of the “I” and turn him into a dispossessed entity without fixed identity or foundation. The voice which has, according to the unnamable, “denatured me, which never stops” (401) is not his own. He says: “They’ve blown me up with their voices, like a balloon, and even as I collapse it’s them I hear” (371). Elsewhere he calls attention to his unenviable fate: “I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak.” (357) He is the “teller and the told” (352).

In tackling the question of the consciousness of postmodern man, Beckett faces the following predicament. Can something ground itself when losing ground in precisely what seems to define it? Can one
hear oneself and thus understand and know oneself intimately when that intimacy is made up of solitude or a farrago of voices?

Watt and the Trilogy constitute a postmodern critique of representation because they emanate from the wound that ruptures the language of representation and deliberately challenges modernity. This break is caused by an economy of difference that resists the closure of representation. Beckett’s writings represent a methodical transgression of what Deleuze calls “image of thought” (Difference and Repetition 129-167) or the institutionalized control of thought that organizes being through organic difference or “difference in itself” (Difference and Repetition 28-69) through representation.

Beckett’s texts activate orgic difference, a radical order of narration that both resists and displaces the organic taming of being by representation. The appraisal of representation is an internal activity that comprises a construction (articulation) and deconstruction of the common sense and reason that both supports and surpasses this system. The text is, thus, a problematization of the organic through the inference of the orgic in the verbalizing of the organic. Beckett produces a palimpsest of representation that results in a surfeit of virtualities repudiating mimetic representation.

Beckett’s transgression of representation need not be regarded as a path breaking revolution of sorts. Even though it bares its devices by being self-conscious, it does not offer itself as an alternative
structure to replace an antiquated one as modernist texts do. Rather, Beckett’s text is a liminal force that forbears and surpasses all forms, a nomadic and aleatory point disseminated in the narrative process that created it. Critics have noted the significance of repetition in this context. Linking repetition to the question of being and meaning, Steven Connor remarks that:

Repetition is a central and necessary concept within all attempts to understand individual and social being and representation [. . .]. It is therefore no accident that Samuel Beckett, the writer who in this century has most single-mindedly dedicated himself to the exploration of what is meant by such things as being, identity and representation should have at the centre of his work so strong and continuous a preoccupation with repetition. (1)

Connor also spots an affinity between Beckett’s application of repetition and the way repetition operates as an act of self-differentiating difference in Derrida and Deleuze. However, Connor has noted that many critics of Beckett have taken repetition as an innovative artistic devise capable of reinstating a definitive centre and a sense of unity to the process of representation. The remark by Ruby Cohn that repetition functions as a “constructive centering principle” (105) is a case in point. Rubin Rabinovitz tries the taxonomy of the recurring patterns of repetition in Beckett’s texts according to the
incidence of their recurrences. For him repetition is a way of establishing order in chaos rather than a deliberate attempt to trigger pure difference. He says, “The repetition in the trilogy, as in many of Beckett’s other works, is part of a highly structured pattern underlying the apparent chaos of its surface meaning” (31). For Rabinovitz, this underlying pattern becomes a new centre, a new structure able to hold together the whimsical peregrinations of meaning. Being formalistically inclined Rabinovitz overlooks the fact that the modernist demarcation between content and form is largely absent in Beckettian writing.

Beckett’s articulation of meaning affects the manner in which it is said. The words, syntax and narrative structure are shaped by what is being said and the chaotic form of these novels serves to highlight the end of the classical and modernist form-content binary. In challenging the integrity of the structure, Beckett and Deleuze remind us of a simple proposition that lay out the stakes of any transgressive act. The act of professing knowledge runs the risk of forgetting that we do not really know. However, the declaration that we are ignorant forces us to be controlled by the project of absolute knowledge since we do not know what not to know really means. As far as Beckett is concerned, this paradox can never be sublated. Dialectics will not save metaphysics, as it is about to cave into nonsense or disappear into infinite difference. Beckett’s post-Hegelian pursuit requires a practice
of the paradox and the parodic difference rather than of the dialectic, a recovery of Deleuzian and Derridian difference to present an order of being indifferent to representation. This approach involves a neutralization of the discourse of metaphysics. It is a silencing analogous to the objective of Bataille’s transgressive project against Western metaphysics.

This particular treatment of difference involves a writing that as we shall see endangers the very language that gives this writing a foundation. It becomes a tentative materiality intent on questioning the conceptual devices that purport to shape language internally as signifier, signified, and sign and externally as the referent and the concept. Thus, Beckett’s writing executes a deconstructionist tactic that comes close to contemporary post-structuralist critiques. Lance St John Butler has suggested in Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being that Beckett “is the poet of the poststructuralist age”(x). There is no doubt that Beckett’s works attempt the deconstruction of presence and identity which indicate the differential nature of being through the simultaneous experience of exhaustion and proliferation, a persistent theme in both the form and contents of Watt and the Trilogy. The overall purpose of these strategies is to force the text to dispute the claims of unequivocal exposition of human experience by the narrative voices. Beckettian writing engages ambiguity and disparity as the essential aspects of the production of reality as simulacrum. Beckett’s
deconstructive writing as it reacts to the logic of the simulacrum exposes its own failure to provide ground for an adequate representation of being. Rather, Beckett’s writing is an endless repetition of being that lets the difference in being to be. Angela B. Moorjani suggests in “The Magna Mater Myth in Beckett’s Fiction: Subtext and Subversion” that “every text repeats other texts, which repeat still other texts, and so forth ad infinitum, is nowhere more dramatically evident than in Beckett’s writing” (149). Writing affords no point of resistance and no resolution of meaning. Beckett does not compose meaningful action but performs a questioning of meaning.

Beckett’s narratives draw the pen, at the end of each sentence, invariably towards a question mark on the very essence of the sentence. The way the word Watt parodies the interrogative ‘what’ shows how the interrogative is designed to be the overall background of the text itself. What drives the question in the text is the awareness of a basic otherness operating at the heart of identity—a movement of retracing. It is not just a repetition of the same, but rather the self-differentiation within the difference present in any repetition when it is emancipated from a general model of equivalence. Postmodern literature is a transgressive writing, a voice trying to constitute itself (and the world) away from the very language without which it would not exist. In doing so this voice only
manages to differentiate itself further from itself, as it remains trapped in the very words that continue to generate its self-alienation. Beckett’s engagement with what is traditionally called the literary takes the form of an exploration and a transgression. Instead of confirming or illustrating a general system of thought like in realistic representation, Beckettian fiction becomes the space where that very system is questioned, parodied and displaced through the activity of the language. This language in turn is itself endlessly worked over by the uncertain limits of the voice speaking or writing in it. This is the reason why the role of language in Beckett is never to fictionalise reality but rather to verbalize the fiction at work in reality. The status of language is not defined by a previous identity but by a search for identity that fails inevitably to further the knowledge about being and the world. It provides at best less illusion and more ignorance regarding the question of who or what speaks this knowledge. The voice, says Dieter Wellershoff,

wants to say the last, conclusive word, which does not exist and for the sake of which talking exists. It is an infinite circle in which the desperate determination to end is identical with the determination not to give up. (92)

This dissertation also examines the way in which the production of meaning in Beckett necessarily involves a deliberate articulation of
non-sense and a questioning of meaning through non-sense. Beckett’s text resides in a non-place located beyond identity and presence because it enacts a post-dialectical logic of meaning that performs the production of the self as immediately an ‘other’ (of itself). The postmodern text is the product of a variety of internal mechanisms embedded in the narrative that transports the text to a space beyond dialectical resolutions. This space corresponds to an insurmountable level of otherness that can never be represented as such. These inner devices stimulate the transgressive movement of the text. These mechanisms involve disjunction, fragmentation, discontinuity, difference, paradox and the logic of simulacrum. In Beckett, we can find the troubled and conflicting play of language constantly extinguishing itself and transgressing its own process of representation. Ihab Hassan notes:

Nothing is ontologically whole in Beckett’s world, objects and persons are predetermined to be partial, and events can be more accurately described as near-events [...] and things are ambiguous. It is as if persons, objects and events are observed hazily from a distance, and the act of observation itself invalidated both subject and object. The senses are seldom offered data sufficient for judgement, and when they are the time lag between perception and expression condemns the latter to eternal obsolescence.
The senses thus and by refusing to distinguish between illusion and reality, and consciousness far from directing action or controlling matter, ends by displaying its infinite mutation. (137)

Beckett’s text is also an instance of confusion, the becoming object of the subject and the strange subjection of the object that remains forever resistant, elusive and unnameable. Samuel Beckett probably represents the high point of the postmodernist project that tries to outwit the traditional schemes of representation—classical and modernist—built on subject-object duality and the separation of self and other. Through a narrative game involving words, voices and silences he generates the knowledge of ignorance and a transgressive return to ignorance through the deconstruction of knowledge.

Chapter 1 examines how the postmodernist concept of transgression provides a decisive break from Hegelian epistemology and how Beckett’s oeuvre embraces this postmodernist ethos. A detailed critical reading of Beckett’s major novels is undertaken to highlight the attempted transgression of representation, reality, meaning and the unified subjective position. The subservience of Western philosophy to Hegelian dialectics and its concept of the unified self are explored. The post-dialectical concept of transgression is presented through a study of Bataille, Derrida and Foucault.
Chapter II is a detailed analysis of Beckett’s novels to show how the application of difference—epistemological, narratological, semantic, and subjectivist—stimulates the transgressive impulse. The idea of conceptual and orgic difference propounded by Giles Deleuze and Derrida’s notion of difference are examined in detail along with Lyotard’s insistence on the end of grand narratives and the prominence of “differend”.

Chapter III is an exposition of the transgressive transformation of narrative into the logic of simulacrum in the novel Watt, because of the breakdown of classical and modernist concepts of representation, through a reading of Deleuze’s analysis of Plato and representation and Baudrillard’s formulation of postmodernist simulation.

Chapter IV attempts to look at the textual strategy of repetitive parody where repetition engenders parody, focusing mainly on Watt. The evolution of parodic strategies is traced through the writings of Linda Hutcheon and Bakhtin in particular. The chapter discusses in detail how parody promotes the transgressive disruption of the discourse of representation.